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ABSTRACT

According to data collected in Spring 1992 as part of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, 44% of high school seniors in 1993 had performed some type of unpaid community service in the past 2 years, and approximately 15% of all high school seniors performed some required service during the same period. Half of the seniors performing required community service reported that the requirement was connected to a class. The percentage of seniors reporting service that was entirely voluntary was nearly twice as high (29%) as the proportion reporting at least some required service. Females were more likely to perform community service than males, and whites and Asians were more likely to perform community service than were members of other racial/ethnic groups. Students' likelihood of performing community service also increased with their family socioeconomic status, reading proficiency, participation in college preparatory programs, and attendance at Catholic or other private schools. Church-related groups were the most frequently mentioned type of organization through which students performed their community service. Nearly half the seniors performing community service reported service involving one type of organization, and approximately one-fifth reported involvement with three or more types of organizations. (MN)

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NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

EDUCATION POLICY ISSUES: STATISTICAL PERSPECTIVES

Community Service Performed by High School Seniors

October 1995

The NCES Education Policy Issues series is designed to provide the best statistical information available on important policy questions. The series primarily provides responses grounded in statistical findings, but also, as appropriate, provides some information based on smaller scale research and case studies.

Having students perform unpaid community service is seen as beneficial for both society and the individual. Currently there is considerable interest in increasing student involvement in community service. At the postsecondary level, the interest is in national service linked to the forgiveness of obligations for student financial aid. At the secondary level, states and school districts are considering or have adopted ways to increase opportunities for community service through elective courses and extracurricular activities as well as instituting community service graduation requirements.

However, in the past there has been little information available about the extent and nature of community service performed by students. The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) provides some insights into this issue for secondary students. In the spring of 1992, NELS:88 asked high school seniors about any community service they had performed in the past two years, and found that:

- 44 percent of seniors reported performing such service;
- Females, whites, Asians, seniors from higher socioeconomic status families, seniors with higher reading proficiency, seniors in private schools, and seniors in urban schools were more likely to perform service than other seniors; and
- About half the seniors performing service were involved with church-related organizations. Between 20 and 25 percent were involved in service with youth, community, and education groups.

How many seniors perform community service?

Less than half (44 percent) of high school seniors in 1992 had performed any unpaid community service in the past two years (table 1). About 15 percent of all seniors performed some required service during that period. (These seniors may also have performed non-required service.) Half (50 percent) of the seniors performing required community service reported the requirement was in connection with a class (others reported court-ordered service or service related to some other type of requirement).

The proportion reporting service that was entirely voluntary was nearly twice as high (29 percent) as the proportion reporting at least some required service (table 1). About one-third (34 percent) of the seniors who did not perform any required service indicated they had done some service that was not required (last column in table 1).

Who performs community service?

The likelihood of performing community service is associated with a number of student characteristics (table 1). Females were more likely

Table 1. 1992 high school seniors reporting any community service in the past two years by student characteristics and whether any of the service was required

Student characteristics	Percent of all seniors performing service			Of seniors with no required service, percent performing service[2]
		Any service required?		
	Total[1]	Yes	No	
Total	44.0	15.1	28.7	33.8
Sex				
Male	38.4	13.4	24.8	28.7
Female	49.5	16.8	32.6	39.2
Race/ethnicity				
White	46.1	15.2	30.8	36.3
Black	35.5	14.4	20.9	24.4
Hispanic	39.3	15.2	23.8	28.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	48.0	18.2	29.7	36.3
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	29.1	9.5	19.6	21.7
Type of school				
Public	42.0	13.2	28.8	33.1
Catholic	66.7	45.1	21.4	39.0
Other private	56.7	21.1	35.0	44.3
High school program				
General	36.6	12.4	24.0	27.4
College preparatory	55.7	19.6	36.0	44.8
Vocational	30.0	10.7	19.1	21.4
Other/unknown	36.4	10.7	25.3	28.3
Socioeconomic status (SES) quartile				
First (low)	29.6	10.1	19.1	21.2
Second	36.5	12.4	23.9	27.3
Third	44.5	15.3	29.2	34.4
Fourth (high)	59.5	20.9	38.5	48.7
Reading proficiency				
Below level 1 (low)	22.6	9.9	12.3	13.6
Level 1	32.5	11.6	20.8	23.5
Level 2	47.4	15.9	31.4	37.3
Level 3 (high)	63.1	22.2	40.8	52.5
Metropolitan location				
Urban	49.2	20.4	28.6	35.9
Suburban	43.6	14.3	29.1	34.0
Rural	40.3	12.0	28.2	32.0
Region				
Northeast	45.4	13.2	32.1	37.0
North Central	43.5	14.9	28.6	33.6
South	42.3	15.4	26.7	31.5
West	46.8	17.6	29.1	35.3

[1] Total includes a few for whom whether any service was required is unknown and who are not shown separately.

[2] Of seniors reporting no required service, the percentage who performed some (voluntary) community service.

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than males, and whites and Asians more likely than blacks, Hispanics and American Indians to perform community service. The likelihood of seniors reporting community service increased with family socioeconomic status (SES). Seniors with higher reading proficiency and those in college preparatory programs were also more likely to perform community service. The differences among SES quartiles and reading levels were very substantial.

Seniors in Catholic and other private schools were more likely to perform community service than public school seniors. Higher proportions of seniors in urban schools reported doing service in the past two years than those in suburban or rural schools. Seniors from different regions of the country did not differ in the likelihood of performing community service.

In general, the patterns found among subgroups relative to performing any service applied to the likelihood of performing required and non-required service, but there were some exceptions (table 1). Seniors in Catholic schools were twice as likely to perform some required service as their peers in other private schools, who in turn were more likely to do so than seniors in public schools. While a lower share of seniors in Catholic schools performed non-required service only, this was because so many of them performed some required service. Among those who had not performed any required service (last column in table 1), seniors in Catholic schools were as likely to perform non-required service as seniors in other types of schools. Seniors in urban schools were more likely to perform some required service than seniors in suburban and rural schools, but did not differ in their likelihood of performing non-required service only.

What types of organizations are seniors involved with in their community service?

Church-related groups were the type of organization most frequently mentioned by seniors in connection with their community service (table 2). Almost half of the seniors who had done any community service reported their service involved church groups. Between one-fifth and one-fourth of the seniors performing community service reported being involved with youth, community, and education groups.

Table 2. Types of organizations with which 1992 seniors were involved in community service in the past two years by whether any of the service was required

Type of organization	Seniors reporting community service involving type of organization as a percent of: All those reporting service*	Those with some required service	Those without any required service
Church-related	48.7	44.6	50.9
Youth (Scouts/Little League)	25.1	25.1	25.1
Community/neighborhood/ social action	23.2	24.7	22.5
Education	21.0	26.9	16.7
Hospital/nursing home	17.8	21.0	16.1
Conservation/environmental	12.8	14.5	11.9
Service	11.3	11.3	11.4
Political	9.8	11.1	9.1

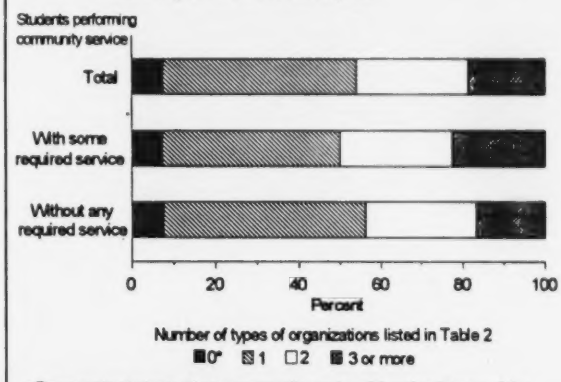
*Includes a few for whom whether any service was required is unknown and who are not shown separately

Whether any of their service was required was generally unrelated to the types of organizations with which seniors were involved in their service with three exceptions. While church-related groups were the most frequently reported type of organization for seniors both with and without any required service, those with some required service were less likely to mention church-related groups than those without any required service. On the other hand, seniors who reported that at least some of their service was required were more likely to report their service involved education groups and hospitals/nursing homes than those without any required service.

NELS:88 did not ask about the frequency of the service or how many different types of community service were performed. However, the number of types of organizations with which seniors were involved in community service is suggestive of their level of service activity.

Almost half the seniors performing some service reported service involving one type of organization; about one-fifth reported three or more types of organizations (figure 1). Seniors with some required service were slightly more likely to report three or more types of organizations (23 percent compared to 17 percent) and less likely to report service involving one type of organization (43 compared to 49 percent).

Figure 1. Number of types of organizations 1992 seniors were involved with in performing community service in the past two years by whether any of the service was required



* Represents students whose community service did not involve any of the types of organizations listed in Table 2.

What further information about performing community service is needed?

The frequency and duration of the service performed by 1992 seniors are unknown. The service being reported could have represented anything from a regular commitment that spanned a significant period of time to a one-time activity taking a few hours. We also do not know how much service younger students are performing.

Extensive information about the community service activities of students will be gathered by NCES in 1996 through the National Household Education Survey. That information will provide a detailed picture about the service activities of students in grades 6-12.

This issue brief was prepared by Mary Frase, Data Development Division (202) 219-1807. Data source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), Second Followup Survey. For further information about NELS:88, contact Jeffrey Owings, (202) 219-1777, and about the National Household Education Survey: 1996, contact Kathryn Chandler, (202) 219-1767. A technical appendix with standard errors and additional information about NELS:88 is available upon request.

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